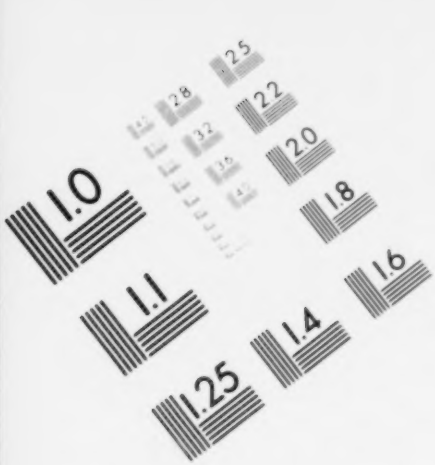

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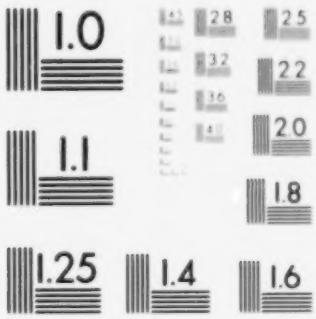

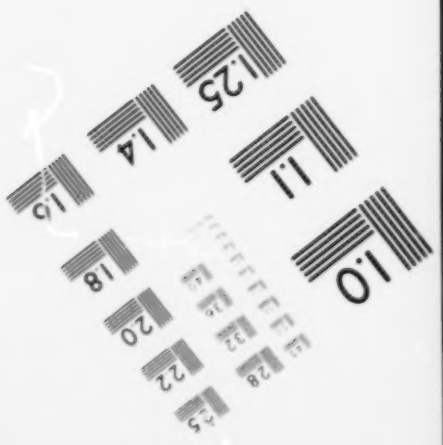

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ABSTRACT

Demographic changes are causing leaders in education, business and civic affairs to address new questions about racial and ethnic diversity. What opportunities does diversity provide? What difficulties does it create? What changes are needed in the ways that people look at problems, define solutions and do the everyday business of their lives? The experiences of parents, educators and community people in a school-community partnership in Saint Paul, Minnesota offer valuable insights for people who are trying to answer these questions. The partnership was part of Supporting Diversity in Schools (SDS), a program that works in three arenas: system change in elementary and secondary education, diversity and racial equity, and organizational collaboration. The aim of SDS is to bring together schools and community organizations to work on issues of racial equity in order to increase the school success of children of color. Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer (Cambodian Children's Education Partnership) was created in September 1989 as one of the first SDS partnerships. Sahaka (as it was called for short) was regarded as one of the most promising of SDS's five partnerships. Trust among participants appeared to be high, and creative planning had yielded a schedule of activities that held significant promise for reaching the goals of SDS. But, by June 1992, the participants in Sahaka had dissolved the partnership. While most admit to having feelings of goodwill, positive memories and excitement about personal growth, much can be learned from the events that led to the disappointment, anger and resentment that dominated people's interaction during the last months of the partnerships. The report describes lessons learned about the interaction of human relationships and organizational structures toward accomplishing tasks, about the importance of learning from mistakes, and about the confusion that results when people bring conflicting world-views to a task. The report contains three major sections. The first chronicles the events in the partnership since 1989, the second reflects on the issues that those events raised, and the third looks at the impact of the Sahaka experience. Except for the SDS program and the Sahaka partnership, all individual and organizational names within the report are pseudonyms. (GLR)

ED 366 698

Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer:

Issues of Diversity and Partnership

SDS is supported by

The Saint Paul Foundation

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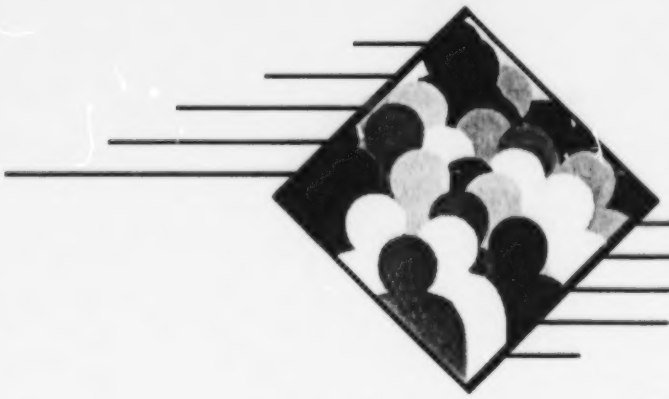
Sahaka is more than a story about schooling, for it has much to offer people in all fields who grapple with issues of racial diversity.



SAHAKA SIKSA KAUN KHMER

A Study Guide

Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer is a fascinating story of four organizations and the people within them who came together with high hopes and exciting dreams of forming a school-community partnership to work on issues of racial equity. Less than three years from its birth, the partnership dissolved—in weariness, frustration and even anger.

The history of this partnership is chronicled in the case study, "Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer: Issues of Diversity and Partnership". The lessons within the case study are important. They say much to people in schools, foundations, private industry and other organizations that are trying to understand the obligations for change and opportunities for growth that reside in the tasks of becoming multiracial and multicultural.

The staff of Supporting Diversity in Schools (SDS), the program under whose auspices Sahaka was created, offer the following suggestions to people who have expressed an interest in using the story of Sahaka as a tool in staff development within their own organizations. We hope that these materials will be useful in your efforts toward diversity and equity.

SDS Staff

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Supporting Diversity in Schools through Family and Community Involvement

Activity I

All participants should read Chapter I, "What Happened When: A Chronology of Events."
Discussion Questions:

1. What events and/or interactions described in this chapter can people feel most proud of?
   What might they look back at with the deepest regret?

2. In what ways did cultural misunderstandings and/or stereotypes
   interfere with people's efforts to work together?

3. People in Sahaka talked often of their shared goals.
   In what ways did they, in fact, share a vision?
   In what ways did various people actually seek different and even-conflicting visions?

4. Who did you identify with in this chapter?
   What do you wish that person had done differently?

5. Was dissolution the best option for people within the partnership?
   Might other alternatives have been considered?

6. What are the main themes of this chapter?
   What were the major barriers that prevented partnership success?
   Brainstorm a list of themes and barriers for later discussion.

Activity II

All participants should read Chapter II, "Why Did It Happen? What Does It Mean?".
Discussion Questions:

1. Discuss several of the themes identified in this section.
   Do you agree that these are important issues in the life of the partnership?
   Are there any points that you would interpret differently from
   the way that the authors of the study interpreted them?

2. How does your list from #6 above compare
   with the themes and barriers identified in this section?
   What additions would you make to the authors' analysis of the partnership?

3. In what ways do issues of cultural difference permeate
the various themes and barriers identified by the authors?
In what ways would some of these themes and barriers exist
even if cultural differences were not involved?

4. Could you have anticipated some of the problems that arose within the partnership?
What steps could have been taken to overcome some of the barriers identified in this chapter?

Activity III

Consider your interactions with people of races and cultures different from your own — at work or in your personal life.
Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever experienced misunderstandings
similar to those among participants in Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer?
In retrospect, what could you have done to have avoided
the misunderstandings or to address them once they occurred?

2. Consider ways in which you and colleagues of other races are expected to work together.
What interpersonal tools do you need to be successful at those endeavors?
How are those tools different from those needed for any successful collegial relationships?

3. What assumptions, biases or uncertainties do you have
about people of different races with whom you are expected to work?
Discuss ways that you could check out their accuracy.

4. Participants in Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer were oftentimes tripped up
by their lack of knowledge about each other's cultures.
What are some ways that you can learn about the cultures of people different from yourself?
What activities and resources are available within your organization and/or community to help you?

5. Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer dissolved.
Would this be an option within your own work?
If not, what are some of the ways that you and your colleagues deal with cross-cultural stress?
Are these healthy strategies?
What other options could be developed?

6. How do stereotypes that others have of your culture and/or racial background
negatively affect your work and/or personal life?

7. How can your work and/or organization be strengthened by recognition of diversity? Are there ways in which you fear it might be weakened?

Activity IV

Develop an action plan for multicultural growth.

1. Identify several of the basic cultural values that form a foundation of your own beliefs and interactions. Discuss with a colleague of a different race and/or cultural background ways that these are the same or different from that person's values.

2. List three ways that you will seek to learn about cultures different from your own.

3. List three ways that you will try to change the area of your work environment over which you have direct control, in order that it can become more productive for people of varying races and cultures.

4. List three ways that you can join with others in your workplace to make it more productive for people of varying races and cultures.

Supporting Diversity in Schools

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St. Paul, Minnesota 55101

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Supporting Diversity in Schools (SDS) is a six-year program inaugurated in September 1989, in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The program seeks to address the educational inequities experienced by children as a result of their race or culture by building school environments that welcome, appreciate and effectively teach children of color.

Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer:
Issues of Diversity and Partnership

A Report of
Supporting Diversity in Schools
(SDS)

and

The Saint Paul Foundation

September 1992

There is a degree of isolation, and we are almost powerless to do anything about it without some other assistance.

Principal Researcher: Stacey Stockdill
SDS Evaluator
(8/15/89 - present)

Principal Writer: Ruth Anne Olson
SDS Co-Director
(8/15/92 - present)
SDS Director
(8/15/89 - 8/15/92)

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INTRODUCTION

Demographic changes throughout our nation are causing leaders in education, business and civic affairs to address new questions about racial and ethnic diversity. What opportunities does diversity provide? What difficulties does it create? What changes are needed in the ways that people look at problems, define solutions and do the everyday business of their lives?

The experiences of parents, educators and community people in a school-community partnership in Saint Paul, Minnesota offer valuable insights for people who are trying to answer these questions. The partnership was part of Supporting Diversity in Schools (SDS), a program that works in three arenas: system change in elementary and secondary education, diversity and racial equity, and organizational collaboration. The aim of SDS is to bring together schools and community organizations to work on issues of racial equity in order to increase the school success of children of color.

Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer (Cambodian Children's Education Partnership) was created in September 1989 as one of the first SDS partnerships. Sahaka (as it was called for short) was regarded as one of the most promising of SDS's five partnerships. Trust among participants appeared to be high, and creative planning had yielded a schedule of activities that held significant promise for reaching the goals of SDS.

But by June 1992, the participants in Sahaka had dissolved the partnership. While most admit to having feelings of goodwill, positive memories and excitement about personal growth, much can be learned from the events that led to the disappointment, anger and resentment that dominated people's interaction during the last months of the partnership.

Sahaka is more than a story about schooling, for it has much to offer people in all fields who grapple with issues of racial diversity. Sahaka is a story about the depth of energy and commitment that scores of people brought to the task of building a partnership and about the ways that cultural

differences bumped into one another and created barriers to positive change. It contains lessons about the interaction of human relationships and organizational structures toward accomplishing complex tasks, about the importance of learning from mistakes and about the confusion that resulted when people brought conflicting world-views to a task.

Diversity and cultural difference are at the heart of this story, and even in the telling, one must be aware of the conflicts of culture inherent in differing world-views and traditions. While the authors grapple with a desire to be respectful and inclusive of the various cultural and organizational values of people involved, we are aware that we only scratch the surface of understanding our differences. We offer a serious caution to the reader who might be inclined to dismiss many of the lessons of this report as being relevant only to the extreme differences as they apply to refugee groups in our communities. Instead, the experience of SDS suggests that they apply to relationships among people who have shared this country for hundreds of years.

This portrait of Sahaka contains three major sections. The first chronicles the events in the partnership since 1989, the second reflects on the issues that those events raised, and the third looks at the impact of the Sahaka experience. Except for the SDS program and the Sahaka partnership, all individual and organizational names within the report are pseudonyms.

We thank the people who have patiently seen us through the tasks of reaching for accuracy and understanding. Their willingness to make their experience visible for others to learn from is evidence of their commitment to the cause of racial equity.

Stacey H. Stockdill
Ruth Anne Olson

MAJOR PARTICIPANTS

Fulton Community Center
The pseudonym for a community organization that participated in Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer.

Staff Pseudonyms:
- Meredith Anderson
- Jason Richards
- Collin Stanford
- Kent Winters

Supporting Diversity in Schools
The actual name of the program that created and supported Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer.

Staff Pseudonyms:
- Angie Adams
- Susan Kromarty
- Iris Martin
- Darcy Riley
- Sara Rogers
- Laurel Schmidt

SAHAKA SIKSA KAUN KHMER
The actual name of an SDS school-community partnership.

Staff Pseudonyms:
- Neang Neary
- Neay Sao

Cambodian Human Services Center (CHSC)
The pseudonym for a refugee organization that participated in Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer.

Staff Pseudonyms:
- Lok Kosal
- Henry Miller
- Neang Sopheap
- Shawn Stevens

Howard Elementary School
The pseudonym for a school that participated in Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer.

Staff Pseudonyms:
- Shannon Davis
- Bonnie Gibson
- Tracy Landers
- Aaron Mitchell
- Meg Phillips
- Andrea Rondo
- Devon Thompson
- Alicia Whiting

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN: A CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

Between 1987 and 1989, more than one hundred parents, students, educators and community members participated in the design of the program that was to become SDS. One person who heard of this effort and asked to be kept informed was a staff member of the Khmer Society of Buddhists (KSB). KSB was about to spin off a new organization, the Cambodian Human Services Center (CHSC), that would focus on human service needs of Cambodian people. CHSC would be anxious to participate in the proposed program.

On the last day of school in June 1989, the creation of SDS was announced to elementary principals in St. Paul. The principal and assistant principal from Howard Elementary School came forward immediately. They were excited by what they had heard and hoped that Howard could become part of the program.

DESIGNING THE DREAM (Fall 1989 - Spring 1990)

When the new school year began, CHSC, Fulton Community Center and Howard began to talk about forming an SDS partnership. Howard and Fulton staffs previously had worked on various cooperative activities, and CHSC and Fulton staffs recently had explored joint activities to serve Cambodians. Staffs of all three organizations were interested in focusing on Cambodian issues and culture—CHSC because it was a Cambodian mutual assistance association, Fulton because it was interested in having Cambodian people in its programs, and Howard because it had a significant number of Cambodian students (approximately 20 of the 400 Cambodian students scattered throughout the district's 50 schools) who tended to be left out of other targeted programs at the school. SDS Coordinators Darcy Riley and Angie Adams became the designated representatives of SDS to the partnership.

In October, the partners submitted a planning proposal to the SDS Advisory Committee. The committee approved a $2,000 SDS planning grant, and the new partnership became eligible to submit a proposal for implementation funding of $25,000 renewable for up to five years if the partnership continued to meet the program criteria.

Staffs of the participating organizations began developing plans and accepted CHSC Board Member Neang Sopheap's suggestion that they name their partnership Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer. They surveyed teachers from Howard, conducted informal interviews with Cambodian parents, and held an information-gathering meeting with parents.

In its proposal to SDS, Sahaka proposed to create three groups that would manage and implement its project. The **SDS Core Staff** of seven people would include Howard teachers and Fulton social workers who would coordinate partnership activities and act as the "body of the SDS program within the school." **SDS Khmer Families** would include families of Cambodian students and other interested community leaders and would serve as the voice of the community to ensure that Cambodian cultural concerns would be properly understood and acted upon by teachers and administrators at the school. The **Partnership Advisors** would include four Cambodian parents or community leaders as well as representatives of the Core Staff. The Partnership Advisors would determine appropriate curricula additions, ensure that Sahaka's ongoing activities matched the priorities of the SDS program and the needs of Howard students, and direct the activities of a project liaison.

The Partnership proposed to hire a **part-time bilingual project liaison** who would function as the initiator of cooperative activities. Sahaka's proposal explained, "After opening lines of communication and initiating various activities with school personnel and community members, the liaison will pass on the continuing responsibility to others." The creators of Sahaka were aware of an incident in another school where a bilingual teacher was to assume community liaison responsibilities, but "Cambodian families identified this person with the school rather than with their community. The program failed." Knowledge of this experience led Sahaka planners to decide that the liaison would not be supervised by school staff but would take direction from the Partnership Advisors and would be an employee of CHSC.

Proposed activities included:

- **A regular series of Cambodian culture workshops** at Howard in conjunction with normal staff meetings.

- **Curricula for classes at all levels** to be created by Fulton staff, Cambodian parents and SDS Core Staff.

- **Activities for parents** that would include formation of a Cambodian parents' group, spring and fall orientations, translations, a multicultural lending library, family visits to the Parent Drop-In Center at Howard, home visits, adult literacy programs, and a Make It and Take It program to acquaint parents with the school's curriculum.

- **Visits by Cambodian community leaders** to speak to Howard classes throughout the school year.

- **Invitations to Howard and Fulton staff members to attend cultural events** in order to give them more first-hand experience with the family and cultural environment in which Khmer students live.

- **Student support groups and inclusion of Cambodian preschoolers** at Fulton Community Center.

The proposal designated Teacher Devon Thompson and Principal Meg Phillips from Howard, Executive Director Lok Kosal and Program Director Shawn Stevens from CHSC, and Associate Director Kent Winters from Fulton to be the key participants in Sahaka.

The planning period was characterized by creativity and goodwill. Tension arose briefly during one planning meeting when SDS Director Iris Martin strongly advised against planning for a full-time project liaison. She argued that research shows that people in such positions remain outsiders to the real workings of the school and that while a liaison would accomplish some of the short-term work of the partnership, the position would hinder long-term internalized institutional change. Sahaka planners considered her advice as an inappropriate intrusion; they compromised by planning for a half-time, rather than full-time, liaison.

In February 1990, the SDS Advisory Committee received six implementation proposals, including Sahaka's. Committee members were excited about what they saw, especially in Sahaka's proposal, but they had concerns that led them to return all of the proposals with requests for clarification or additional information. Specifically, they were uncomfortable that Sahaka's proposal was a collection of activities, rather than steps toward a vision, and they asked the partnership for more information regarding long-term change and impact.

Sahaka planners felt they had worked hard and had followed directions, and they were not pleased with the committee's request. They made the revisions, however, and their doubts and annoyances were set aside when they learned in April that the proposal had been funded.

Now the work could begin with several pre-implementation activities. SDS staff members spent a full day at Howard to become acquainted with teachers and to understand how the school worked. Evaluator Laurel Schmidt interviewed key Sahaka players and held a long meeting with the partnership management team to discuss the specifics of how members would define partnership success. The partnership held a half-day workshop on Cambodian history and culture for Howard and Fulton staffs and hired Neay Sao as its bilingual project liaison.

A GLOW OF SUCCESS (Spring and Summer 1990)

Interviews and notes from this introductory period indicate that people felt very good about their partnership. Principal Meg Phillips talked of the school's relationship with Cambodian parents:

"There is a degree of isolation, and we are almost powerless to do anything about it without some other assistance. I hope we get to the point where we not only reduce the isolation of the parents but of staff people as well. Won't it be wonderful when we get to the next step, when our liaison will take staff people to homes. That would be a difficult experience for them. They'll wonder, 'Will I be welcome? Will my visit be considered impolite or inappropriate?' The people at CHSC have knowledge of things that we need to know."

Teacher Devon Thompson hoped that Sahaka could fill in the gaps in her knowledge of Cambodian culture and of the special needs of Cambodian children many of whose families were refugees from extreme violence in Cambodia.

She saw the potential for developing resources of stories and other materials for teaching about Cambodia that are not available within the larger school district. She also hoped for opportunities to participate in workshops on cultural sensitivity and bias. In short, she was excited by the prospect of being able to participate in a program whose goals were so close to her own.

Fulton staff members were also excited about what lay ahead. They were pleased about the selection of Neay Sao as the project liaison and were particularly glad to have him working out of Fulton over the summer. Social Worker Meredith Anderson, who joined the team when Associate Director Kent Winters left Fulton to become director of a sister agency, explained, "I sort of shiver at the time when Neay Sao won't be around anymore, because I think our ownership of him has been pretty strong. It realizes a dream for us to have an Asian on the staff."

But Meredith Anderson also had some doubts about SDS. "It feels sometimes that SDS has an underlying assumption that Howard is not doing an effective job at multicultural education. That is one thing I would adamantly refute." In addition, she was uncomfortable with some of the discussions she had heard regarding possible inservice activities. "Do you fight and eradicate racism, or do you enrich people's lives with diversity," she said. "I think sometimes in fighting a problem you create even more dysfunction. I see it in a more positive way building partnerships, building relationships." Fulton Director Jason Richards was also critical of SDS. "I think that SDS has come in with a chip on its shoulder regarding schools, especially Howard. From my staff's perspective, Howard is doing a really good job."

The days that SDS staff members spent visiting Howard classrooms and programs at Fulton and CHSC were overwhelming positive and affirming of the partnership's potential. Howard staff members expressed pleasure that their SDS colleagues had come, and the visitors saw many praiseworthy activities and interactions.

Many people had worked hard, and the fruits of their labors were beginning to ripen.

Howard was the seventh school that SDS staff members had visited. Later, when they talked about their experiences, they recalled seeing good teachers in action and learning about the very real logistical barriers to the full involvement of Cambodian parents. They also voiced apprehension about things at the various schools that could be done better, that could be more inclusive of children whose past experiences were so different from those of their teachers.

SDS staff members reflected on their experience in talking with Cambodian people. Instead of using the linear structure common in American English, Cambodian English-speakers seemed to weave a tale that required the listener to stay till the very end before understanding its meaning. The staff wondered how teachers heard that flow in their conversations with Cambodian children and how partnership management team members would fit that style into their discussions and decisions as Cambodian people took on greater leadership in Sahaka.

In a brief overview of each SDS partnership, SDS staff members rated Sahaka's team very high on virtually every dimension of communication and trust. They acknowledged the key role that CHSC staff member Shawn Stevens played in making the partnership work and in moderating the involvement of Cambodian people in conversations. They noted that Lok Kosal had participated very little in the planning process and identified issues of cross-cultural communication and values that would inevitably arise if the management team were successful at incorporating Cambodian people into its decision making.

All in all, the spring and summer of 1990 was a time of positive anticipation for those associated with Sahaka. Many people had worked hard, and the fruits of their labors were beginning to ripen.

REAL PEOPLE, REAL PROBLEMS (Summer 1990 - Fall 1991)

Throughout the summer, Project Liaison Neay Sao visited the homes of Howard's Cambodian students. He recruited people to be guest speakers in the classrooms and to serve as partnership advisors, and he gave families written materials to help them understand American education. He interviewed families about their experiences with the school, and he gathered information that would help his Sahaka colleagues understand the importance of cultural knowledge and respect.

Neay Sao had received permission to help parents of incoming Howard kindergartners fill out various forms, and he made arrangements to go with them to register their children. As September approached, Neay Sao was confident that he had built trust within his own community and that he was in a position to help school staff and Cambodian parents understand one another.

On the day of school registration, much of this preparation collapsed. New forms had been developed, and the ones parents had filled out were no longer acceptable. The registration schedule was not what Neay Sao expected, so the parents had come to school on the wrong day. Neay Sao felt put-down and humiliated at the way he and the parents were received. He reported that one father was so outraged by the experience that he would not send his child to school at all.

Neay Sao had gone from the small environment of Fulton to the highly organized and rushed activities that surrounded the opening days of school for more than 1,000 elementary-aged students. Very few people at Howard knew who he was, and even fewer were aware of what he should be doing. There was no space for him, no desk and no telephone. Feeling alone and frustrated, he returned to Fulton, only to find that someone had already taken over his shared desk there, and the papers he had left behind were now lying on the floor. He called Shawn Stevens at CHSC. "There is a place for you here," Shawn told him. "Come back home."

The tensions of those first few days increased over the next months. Management team members were in frequent and strong disagreement about what Neay Sao should be doing, how he should be doing it, and who should work with him as colleagues and supervisors; significant personality conflicts began to affect the liaison's relationships in all the participating organizations.

Other strains on the partnership also became visible. At a kickoff event hosted by the SDS program for all school-community partnerships and other educators, several people in the audience verbally attacked a school principal who was struggling to understand how she should address issues of cultural difference. Some of the Sahaka participants who were at the workshop expressed strong discomfort with what had occurred.

During an October workshop on leadership sponsored by SDS for partnership management teams, one Sahaka participant asked if SDS was about change. If it was, she was not sure she wanted to be a part of it. Another source of tension surfaced several days later when another member of the management team approached SDS staff members asking for help in addressing communication and accountability problems that had arisen within the team. SDS staff members agreed to help her think about ways to talk about the problems and to get people involved in their solution.

Not all the ferment was negative, however. The leadership workshop had been an exciting and helpful experience and had led to vigorous discussion and sharing of perspectives among several Sahaka participants. An SDS-sponsored activity with Native American readings had a deeply emotional impact on one Sahaka participant, and the experience of a busload of families and teachers who went to a performance of Cambodian classical dancers at the Ordway Theater in downtown St. Paul had been powerful. In early November, Sahaka held a full-day workshop that was well received by the 43 Howard staff members who attended.

While some people expressed hope that the bad times were behind them, others believed that the tensions were still very much alive and went to SDS coordinators for help. Serious conflict arose over roles and expectations, and SDS staff members offered to locate and pay for someone to help the management team work through its uncertainties. The discussion over this suggestion was tense; in the end, the management team declined SDS's offer. As one member explained, "We've opened up and have begun to trust each other now. Sometimes twenty dollars is spent on a five dollar problem."

While some people expressed hope that the bad times were behind them, others believed that the tensions were still very much alive.

Meanwhile, tensions between some individuals on the management team and SDS staff members continued to grow. In a fall issue of the SDS Newsletter, Program Director Iris Martin wrote about the SDS staff members' spring site visits to the eight schools that were participating in SDS partnerships:

"We saw much that illustrated teachers' commitment to children and the diversity of expectations and strengths they bring to classrooms. But we also saw situations where teachers and children were struggling to reach the last

day of school without breaking threads of respect grown dangerously thin over the school year."

Some Sahaka management team members thought this article was a direct criticism of life at Howard. "It really hurt some people to read that," a Howard teacher explained. "I don't know what Iris saw, but it hurt us. We were upset at the negative judgment."

SDS staff members began to voice nervousness because Sahaka had no direct vehicles for including Cambodian parents in the partnership's decision making. "They're not ready," team members replied to SDS staff members' suggestions. "They'd only feel uncomfortable and unprepared for our kind of involvement."

SDS staff members were drawn into conflicts between other management team members. While several individuals turned to the coordinators for support when they found it lacking from colleagues within their own organizations, others criticized SDS staff members' attempts to help individuals and the management team to solve their problems.

An incident involving the disciplining of a child served as a lightning rod for the tensions in the relationships between Neay Sao and many other participants in the partnership. Neay Sao believed strongly that the prescribed disciplinary action was wrong and that it was appropriate for him as the liaison to take action to influence the decision of the teacher involved. Others believed that the actions he took were inappropriate and a direct challenge to their own motives and commitment. Understandings of events around the incident vary widely, but the end result was that Neay Sao resigned as Sahaka liaison. The partnership began the process of hiring a replacement, and by early spring, Neang Neary assumed the position.

An incident involving the disciplining of a child served as a lightening rod for tensions in the relationships.

As the partnership began to design its 1991-1992 proposal to be submitted to the SDS Advisory Committee in mid-March, it was clear that the turmoil of the previous months had taken its toll. None of the expected management groups had been created. The SDS Core Staff—described in the 1990-1991 proposal as assuming primary responsibility for coordinating partnership activities—had never materialized, nor had the Partnership Advisors or the Khmer Families. Instead, Sahaka had a nine-member management team that was a decision-making rather than an activity-implementing group and an executive committee consisting of the school principal and the executive directors of CHSC and Fulton. Partnership activities at Howard and Fulton were also different from what had been proposed. The partnership had hosted one workshop at Fulton and one at Howard, instead of the regular series described in its proposal. Plans to bring together Fulton staff, Cambodian parents and SDS Core Staff to develop curriculum for classes at all levels never materialized, but one teacher, "became the conduit for information regarding Cambodian culture," and efforts were made to gather Cambodian materials. The liaison had made presentations in "at least two classrooms" at Howard instead of the proposed school visits by Cambodian community leaders throughout the school year. Twenty-five school staff members and their families had attended the Cambodian classical dance program, Cambodian parents had provided a traditional meal and music for school staff on the day before winter break, and staff members were encouraged to attend Cambodian New Year's celebrations. Only one Cambodian child had participated in a student support group at Fulton. The inclusion of Cambodian children in the preschool program at Fulton was dropped because the distance from their homes was prohibitive.

Implementation of Sahaka's proposed activities for Cambodian parents was also less than expected. The partnership liaison had helped parents during school registration, CHSC had translated many letters and materials for both Fulton and Howard and home visits had been conducted during the summer of 1990. Proposed parent activities that had not been implemented included the formation of a Cambodian parent's group, involvement of Cambodian parents in adult literacy programs, and Make It and Take It activities to introduce parents to the school's curriculum.

HOPEFUL ANTICIPATION OF THE NEXT YEAR (Spring 1991)

In spite of these major modifications, Sahaka participants were hopeful as they designed their 1991-1992 activities. People were excited by the talents that Neang Neary brought to the partnership, and they were determined to learn from the past.

As they planned their new proposal, they talked of the importance of trust and personal growth, organizational

roles, communication and defining lines of supervision. CHSC staff person Shawn Stevens talked about the difficulties of communicating across cultures:

"The SDS program presents a special challenge because it reaches our identities and our ideals. When two people do not have sufficient experience in a shared language and subject matter, dictionary explanations cannot replace the underlying meanings that are lost, and trustworthy communication cannot take place—both sides miss the full story."

While sobered by the problems of the year before, participants were once again confident that they could learn a great deal from each other. Their list of proposed activities was long and comprehensive. They planned to hold a fall diversity training workshop and retreat for members of their management team. They would develop multicultural curriculum, host a series of staff inservices, invite staff to cultural activities, hold parent-teacher forums on such subjects as discipline, and develop a Cambodian newsletter. They would also have a variety of activities specifically for parents: orientations, school tours, preparation for parent-teacher conferences, home visits and mentoring.

Learning from their previous experiences, people worked hard to introduce Neang Neary to the school and explain her responsibilities. Neang Neary had been a teacher in Cambodia and seemed to understand the institution of the school and the role of teachers. Her experience was seen as a major asset, and school staff members were confident that she would understand teachers' issues, along with those of Cambodian parents and students. Teacher Devon Thompson explained:

"She was a teacher in Cambodia, and she is very willing to come and talk to us frequently to get our input. She's willing to listen to both sides — she seems to dissipate tension because she gets first hand knowledge. She's very helpful, and I see her role expanding."

But some problems were still visible. Shawn Stevens explained one issue that concerned him:

"There's still a huge gap between teachers and the parents. There's not often direct communication. The parents are still very, very persistent. People come in and cause quite a stir. It's more than the school staff had expected."

Tensions between some Sahaka participants and SDS staff members grew stronger. The Advisory Committee was made up of professional peers of people within the partnerships—community organization staff members, parents, school principals and other school district staff members from throughout St. Paul. But shared perspectives and experiences did not translate fully into mutual comfort and understanding when it came to making decisions about funding. Devon Thompson objected to the tone that the committee's Review Team had set when it met with Sahaka's management team:

Shared perspectives did not translate into mutual understanding when it came to decisions about funding.

"They violated the most important principle of education to recognize the positive first before you talk about concerns or problems. Every question was, 'I have a concern,' or 'I don't see how you are going to do this.' I was really surprised.

"This was our first direct exposure to members of the Advisory Committee, and I was excited because we had succeeded where I had heard that other partnerships were really having a lot of difficulty. But (the attitude of the review team) was very deflating. I don't know. I will speak for myself. But it was very deflating."

Devon Thompson brought her objections to SDS Coordinator Angie Adams, who received mixed messages about whether anyone else on the management team shared this concern.

Conversations throughout the spring of 1991 highlighted the hopes that several participants placed on the planned retreat for the management team. People would spend time with one another, put issues on the table and make plans

for how to do the things they most wanted to do within the partnership. One person explained:

"I think our partnership has really worked at cross-cultural communication. We realized we had to do more training and developing team-building activities. We're sharing a lot more; we're being more vulnerable to each other, and we're not afraid to make mistakes. We're having a retreat in the fall ... to look at getting down deep to see who we are as a group and how we can work better together."

Some people were particularly aware of work that still needed to be done with parents as they saw the enormity of the barriers between home and school. As one said,

"We had one meeting with parents in which we dealt with an issue about one of our teachers. (The parents) had been under the extreme misconception that this teacher could bring a gun to school and kill the children. This was a real misconception, but it was a real fear. And it had magnified to such an extent that they (completely misunderstood) what this teacher had said. It took a long time of talking with them to get that out on the table."

Some people were particularly aware of work that still needed to be done ... as they saw the enormity of the barriers between home and school.

Clearly much work needed to be done, and people were cautiously hopeful that Sahaka had the people and the structures in place to do it.

THE FINAL UNRAVELING (Fall 1991)

In the fall of 1991, one activity became a high point of Sahaka experience for several people. Neang Neary arranged a meeting with Cambodian parents at a local housing project. Alicia Whiting, who was Howard's assistant principal at the time, was one of those who recalled this event with pleasure:

"Several of us from Howard took treats, and we mainly sat and chatted with people. Many of the parents had brought their children to the meeting, and they were very pleased that we had come. We talked with them about school, we asked them to please come see us—to come visit the school.

"It happened that we had just gotten a notice about a state-sponsored conference for Asian parents that would be held the following Saturday. Time was very short, but we decided to see if some of the parents would like to go. We thought it would be wonderful to expose them to that kind of environment—that it would open up new interests.

"On Saturday morning, I went to the housing project to pick up several parents who had agreed to go. I took my four-year-old son with me because I wanted to show the Cambodian parents that I was a parent, too. Another teacher also took a carload of people and stayed with them at the conference all day.

"The whole experience was wonderful. People became comfortable with me and have since come to me to help with problems or to take care of little things. It was wonderful!"

But difficulties soon overwhelmed the successes for most of the Sahaka participants. A major conflict developed around the process that SDS had designed for defining evaluation issues and for collecting evaluation information. During the summer, the SDS Advisory Committee, SDS staff and partnership management teams had been invited to participate in two meetings in which program "claims", or objectives, would be defined. Each partnership received a group stipend based on the number of people who participated.

Attendance at these meetings had been high—45 people overall, including four from Sahaka—and the meetings generated a general enthusiasm for the importance of the work that had been accomplished and for the diversity of roles and races that had been involved. The next steps in the process included establishing various mechanisms for reaction, feedback and modification through the management teams.

In late September, SDS Evaluator Laurel Schmidt received a letter from the principals of schools participating in three of the SDS partnerships. The principals said that the claims "are not acceptable in terms of providing evaluation of the three SDS partnerships," and in spite of the fact that the district's own evaluation staff was involved, they raised a variety of objections to the claims and the evaluation process. The letter was copied to the district's superintendent and director of elementary education.

The SDS staff members did not question the legitimacy of the principals' concerns, but they knew the intensity of many communities' and parents' feelings of being powerless in relation to the schools and the hope they placed on their equal roles on management teams. Staff members worried that the letter ignored the role of the management team, set the administrators of the school district apart from their partnerships, and would drive a significant wedge in the trust between schools and communities that so many people had worked to create.

Staff members worried that the letter ... would drive a significant wedge in the trust that so many people had worked to create.

While it is not useful to review the specific events that occurred over the next month, it is important to understand the significance of them in the relationships among many different players. Eventually, many of those involved were able to identify their own mistakes. SDS Director Iris Martin reflected:

> "That whole situation was a test of my leadership, and frankly, I didn't pass it. What I should have done was to say crisply and forcefully that the principals' concerns were legitimate but that it was the role of each management team to address those concerns. Then send it all back to each team. Period.
>
> "Instead I kept trying to find my decision of what to do within the advice I was getting from others. And while I stumbled over all the contradictory suggestions from a myriad of people, I created drawn-out agony for many people involved."

Principal Meg Phillips also looked back on the process:

> "That (letter) was a real mistake. It was ill advised, but our intention was good. We knew what we wanted to accomplish, but we didn't use the correct means; we wish we could have done it differently."

Disagreements cut in various directions among the Sahaka participants. In one tension-filled meeting, school staff members pressed Liaison Neang Neary to use some of her time within her Sahaka contract to take on the role of a school district-funded bilingual education assistant (EA) who had recently resigned. One person recalled the discussion:

> "School people had lots of good reasons why Neang Neary should take on the responsibilities of an EA. In their experience, it would probably be months before the district would complete a hiring process to replace the person who had resigned. They needed a Cambodian person to do certain things. Neang Neary was Cambodian, so why shouldn't she just do them.
>
> "But Neang Neary had equally good reasons for saying no. She was an SDS liaison, not an EA. She was the employee of CHSC, not of the school district. Besides, she already had a full list of responsibilities and felt overextended just in doing the things that she was *supposed* to do.
>
> "Three people struggled over this point for more than 40 minutes, while the other seven people in the meeting sat

mostly silent and uncomfortable. In the end, Neang Neary stood her ground."

Opinions expressed outside the meeting about this disagreement were mixed. Some CHSC staff members believed that Neang Neary should have agreed to take on these new responsibilities because it would have built trust. SDS staff members, on the other hand, were taken aback that Howard staff members would make such a request. As one SDS person explained,

> "Neang Neary wasn't the school's all-purpose staff member who should be expected to fill any Cambodian needs. The school district had no legal ability to use SDS funds to fill one of its own positions, even for a few months. The whole discussion should never have happened."

The incident reinforced divisions; relationships between individuals on both sides of the argument continued to deteriorate.

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Throughout the fall of 1991, turnover in the Sahaka management team was a significant issue for the partnership. Of all those who had designed the partnership's first implementation proposal less than two years earlier, SDS Coordinator Angie Adams was the only one still with the partnership. Within a year, Coordinator Darcy Riley had left SDS for Augsburg College, and Lok Kosal had resigned from CHSC because of a terminal illness. Teacher Devon Thompson had not returned to Howard in the fall of 1991; Shawn Stevens resigned from CHSC to move to Chicago; and Darcy Riley's replacement, Sara Rogers, had left SDS for Upward Bound. Principal Meg Phillips left Howard for a position in the central office of the St. Paul school district and by December 1991, Meredith Anderson would leave Fulton for two months on an extended medical leave. New people were brought into the management team: Henry Miller from CHSC; Principal Alicia Whiting and Teachers Shannon Davis, Aaron Mitchell and Tracy Landers from Howard; SDS Coordinator Susan Kromarty; and, on a temporary basis during Meredith Anderson's leave, Collin Stanford from Fulton.

The retreat that so many people had hoped would consolidate the partnership's strengths and air its problems never happened, and few activities targeted to staff members were occurring as planned.

A variety of parent and student activities were moving ahead, as Neang Neary maintained contact with Cambodian families, made classroom presentations on Cambodian culture, and continued to develop a student Cambodian classical dance group. But her position in the school began to be affected by serious uncertainties and disagreements about role definition, supervision, autonomy, channels of communication, and interpersonal communication.

The management team still had no direct channel to parents' interests, either through their direct participation on the team or through a regular flow of information and concerns from the liaison. SDS staff members increasingly became uncomfortable with the other team members' replies that parents were not ready to participate. "What are we doing to get them ready?" SDS staff members asked. No one had an answer.

Attending management team meetings became an unpleasant responsibility. One member later described the meetings as "a task to be endured." "People were in their corners," and lines of disagreement seemed to be drawn organizationally among Howard, Fulton, CHSC, and SDS with a complex set of alliances. Tensions were high between individuals of two of these organizations. One person recalled, "They were assuming all sorts of things about each other, and they were both wrong. They were *both* wrong." This person also noted that individuals from a third organization were angry at the fourth because of a perceived injustice that had occurred months earlier to one of the first two.

Newcomers to the team were left with the task of sorting out the confusion, and basically the task was just too great. According to one newcomer,

> "People came to those meetings with the primary goal of simply *getting through* them; accomplishing something was of secondary importance. I observed that nearly everybody involved considered those meetings to be a terrible burden. Not once did I sense an atmosphere of purpose and resolve."

By November 1991, tensions among many people were high, and many were beginning to feel strong pressure to get on with the activities of the partnership. SDS Coordinators sensed that the unfulfilled list of activities stood in the way of the management team's ability to build solid relationships among the new players. Coordinators Angie Adams and Susan Kromarty suggested to members of the SDS Advisory Committee that they invite Sahaka's management team to decide which activities were most important and to submit a brief request for a contract revision. The committee agreed and wrote to the management team:

> "Our committee has always valued the work of Sahaka and deeply respects the enthusiasm, commitment and energy that you have brought to the program over the past two years. We are concerned that the organizational stresses caused by significant staff changes in all the participating organizations be acknowledged as you move forward in implementation of your 1991-1992 SDS contract."

While some ... welcomed this action and saw it as an opportunity, others were angered by what they saw as an intrusion ...

The committee invited the team to revise and prioritize its list of 1991-92 activities and submit it to the committee for contract revision.

While some members of the management team welcomed this action and saw it as an opportunity, others were angered by what they saw as an intrusion into the internal affairs of the partnership, particularly since SDS staff members had gone straight to the Advisory Committee to request a revision, rather than going first to their colleagues on Sahaka's management team. It was clear that distrust and miscommunication were serious problems.

THE PARTNERSHIP DISSOLVES (Spring 1992)

By the spring of 1992, the number of Cambodian students at Howard had declined, and because of complicated effects of state desegregation requirements there was no possibility of those numbers increasing. On March 2, SDS staff members learned that the administrators of Howard, Fulton and CHSC were considering dissolving the partnership.

SDS Coordinators Angie Adams and Susan Kromarty were startled by this news. They sat on the Sahaka management team, had been part of several discussions to plan the partnership's 1992-93 proposal, which was due in approximately two weeks, and had never heard any suggestion that the partnership might dissolve. To have been left out of all discussion about such a critical decision felt like a negation of their role as equal partners.

Director Iris Martin wrote to the administrators explaining the procedures for dissolution and the steps for finding a new partner for CHSC:

> "... the entire management team does not technically need to be involved in a decision of Howard and Fulton to "voluntarily withdraw." In the spirit of shared decision-making and equal partnership of all participants, however, I would hope that this decision would receive the full discussion of the larger team and that all parties would have a voice in the final decision."

"In the spirit of shared decision-making and equal partnership ... I would hope that this decision would receive full discussion."

Several days later, Iris Martin received a letter from the three administrators saying that they had decided to "pass on the baton" to CHSC to form a new partnership. They praised the positive challenges provided by the program and committed themselves to continue working at the overall goals of SDS.

Within a few days, a Sahaka management team meeting was held at which the dissolution of the partnership was not mentioned. When Iris Martin expressed regret that the decision was never discussed or announced at a team meeting, some members replied that Angie Adams and Susan Kromarty sat on the team—if they were "true partners," they

should have brought it up. Later, several people intimated that the decision to dissolve Sahaka had been made by two of the administrators of partnership organization months before SDS staff members learned of it in March, but no one interviewed for this report was specific about when that decision was made or by whom.

In the final months of the 1991-1992 school year, relationships within the partnership became openly acrimonious, and once again personality differences became a significant issue. Negative feelings cut in almost all directions and ranged from disappointment to intense anger.

Partnership participants implemented several activities during 1991-92, though there is disagreement over whether some fully reflected the partnership's original intentions and others were appropriate to the goals of Sahaka and SDS. An inservice activity attended by 16 Howard, nine CHSC, four Fulton and three SDS staff members focused on Cambodian history and culture. English as a Second Language (ESL) staff members and three Cambodian parents purchased Cambodian folktales and other cultural artifacts for use by ESL teachers. Neang Neary made regular presentations about Cambodian history and culture in Howard classrooms.

Several Cambodian students participated in student support groups at Fulton, and Sahaka's Cambodian dance group performed at Howard's annual multicultural extravaganza. Approximately 50 ESL students took field trips to the school district's kitchen and to a potato chip factory. The liaison made a number of home visits, and CHSC provided translators for various events, including Kindergarten Roundup and parent teacher conferences.

Activities that had been anticipated within Sahaka's SDS contract but were not implemented included the development of a Cambodian Parent Advisory Group, quarterly informational discussions for parents, and inclusion of a parent representative on the partnership's management team.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

By July 1992, participants in Sahaka had begun to reflect on how the experience could inform their ongoing work. Organizational cooperation was still very much a part of their work for many of the people involved in SDS. Fulton and Howard staff members continued to cooperate in various ways, and they had begun to use their shared experience in Sahaka to strengthen their work together. CHSC and SDS were exploring a new school-community partnership under the umbrella of the Organization of Khmer, an organization with which CHSC was discussing a possible merger.

Already, some individuals were looking back on their experience in Sahaka with a sense of pride and growth. They continued to be deeply committed to their own professional goals, and they reported ways that Sahaka would enrich their next efforts to reach them.

CHSC's Neang Sopheap reflected, "When we recognize that we don't know, we're on our way to wisdom." While still unwritten, the next chapters for the four organizations involved in Sahaka are very much a part of the story of this partnership.

"When we recognize that we don't know, we're on our way to wisdom."

WHY DID IT HAPPEN? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The story of Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer is long and complicated. How could a project move from such a high point of good will and creative planning to the anger, hostility and distrust that accompanied its dissolution? What does it mean for similar efforts in education and in the larger community?

This section of the report will reflect on the factors that came to play. The task is hindered by the fact that two management team members declined to be interviewed; therefore, their perspectives may not be fully represented. Nevertheless, a three years' collection of memos, interview notes, correspondence and proposals suggests several themes that played a critical role in the events of this partnership. These include:

- Organizational and individual commitment, while enormously high, was not sufficient to sustain the partnership.
- SDS staff members and other participants within the partnership did not anticipate the complexity of the new procedures and roles that would be required to implement the SDS program.
- Complex issues of culture, language and power prevented full acknowledgement of diversity and involvement of parents.
- Sahaka was unable to create the systems of decision making, communication and conflict resolution critical to building a partnership.
- Issues of time and diversity made the task of maintaining ownership unusually complex.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENT

This report opens by highlighting the high level of commitment demonstrated by everyone involved in this partnership, and this characteristic needs to be noted again as one of the themes in the story of Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer. The reader can see *many* points along the way to dissolution where anyone involved might have said, "Enough! This just simply isn't worth it." But all involved shared one major goal—quality education for children—and they dedicated themselves with incredible strength and conviction to the task of accomplishing that goal.

Various players had differing definitions of what constitutes quality education and, even more often, differing ideas about how to achieve it. All, however, strongly believed that children and their education were important, that good education was something over which they had influence, and that their partnership held a potential for doing more than could be accomplished individually.

This commitment saw people through three years of increasingly difficult times and continued to be visible in people's reflections about their experiences after the partnership had dissolved. People were sobered by what had happened, they were saddened by the weaknesses and limitations that they now saw within their colleagues and in some cases, they were angry and even embittered. But even in the midst of the pain, most people were thoughtful about their own mistakes and about what they had learned. In virtually all the interviews, the discussions about these lessons were framed in the context of how this experience would increase the effectiveness of people's work in the future.

The level of commitment was enormously high, but commitment alone was not sufficient to sustain the partnership.

The level of commitment was enormously high, but commitment alone was not sufficient to sustain the partnership.

BARRIERS TO DOING THE UNTRIED AND THE UNEXPECTED

The SDS program, as it turns out, is a terribly difficult one for people to figure out, for while its vision—increased success in school for children of color—is common to many programs, its means of achieving this vision are quite different from most. (See the appendix.)

Introducing something that shares a vision with other programs but breaks the mold of structure and expectations is not an easy task. In the three years since the SDS program was inaugurated, those responsible for implementing it have stumbled repeatedly in understanding their own roles and in communicating them to people in the partnerships. Even when they have tried to be clear, old expectations created significant barriers to people's ability to accept the new parameters. These problems are illustrated in the events surrounding Sahaka.

Procedures

On the surface, some of the discrepancies seem to be subtle and even insignificant. For example, the program insisted that management teams create equal participation for community organization staff members, teachers, parents, SDS coordinators, administrators and others; but for the first two years, administrators were the only people required to sign official documents. There were, of course, legal reasons for requiring administrative signatures—but there was no need to exclude other signatures and in doing so, the program staff members sent a subtle but unmistakable message about who was most important. While certainly not wholly responsible, this practice may have contributed to the three organizational administrators' assumption that they had no obligation to involve other partnership participants in their decision to dissolve Sahaka.

A similar confusion was created in the first year when all SDS documents referred to SDS "grants." Combining the old language of "grants" with a new expectation of mutual involvement and accountability characteristic of "contracts" created confusion and resentment. An example of such a misunderstanding resulted when the SDS Advisory Committee invited Sahaka to submit a revision of activities in November 1991. The committee's intention was to release Sahaka from some of the pressure of high participant turnover. In the structure of a "contract," significant changes require mutual agreement, not unilateral action. But some members of Sahaka's management team had little experience with contracts, and they saw this request as an unreasonable intrusion into their internal affairs. They reacted from the mind-set of grants, in which they assumed the right to change activities as they saw fit.

In the structure of contracts, significant changes require mutual agreement, not unilateral action.

A third procedural issue was the means of dispensing SDS funds. SDS partnerships are not legal entities in themselves, and as a result, checks cannot be made out in their names. Instead of asking management teams to become legal partnerships, SDS staff members requested that participants designate one organization to receive the dollars in the name of the total partnership. The recipient organization was to assume no special authority over the money but was to serve as a "holding tank," taking direction from the partnership management team about the money's use. Sahaka management team members designated CHSC as the receiving organization and then, in effect, backed away from all continuing responsibility. CHSC appears to have received and managed the money in good faith and in the spirit intended within Sahaka's proposal. But the management team as a whole did not make budget decisions, even after it made significant revisions in its original plan of activities.

The Role of SDS Coordinators

An ongoing problem in Sahaka's relationship with SDS was visible in uncertainty about the role of SDS staff in relation to the partnership and to the larger program. SDS staff is involved with partnerships for three reasons. For one, the health of the program depends on a holistic view of what is happening throughout the total program. Second,

staff members need to understand partnership issues in order to make the best use of resources for workshops and similar educational activities sponsored by the larger program. Finally, as SDS matures, it needs an explicit vehicle for building an institutional memory that allows it to learn, to grow, and to prevent a repetition of mistakes.

Part-time SDS coordinators, paid by the program and not out of individual partnership funds, work in teams of two with each partnership. While SDS has enjoyed significant stability on its own staff (with five of seven original staff members still with the program as it moves into its fourth year), it has had its share of turnover. SDS Coordinator Angie Adams was with Sahaka since its birth in 1989. She had three other coordinator-teammates in her work with Sahaka: Darcy Riley, Sara Rogers and Susan Kromarty.

The second barrier rested in the fact that SDS held the purse strings.

The coordinator's role is to be a full working member of the team—a partner among equals. Coordinators are expected to roll up their sleeves to do the work of the partnership with the same commitment and vigor as all other participants. But, depending on their perspectives, Sahaka participants saw the coordinators as colleagues, allies, advocates, spies, supporters, workers, teammates, monitors or drains on resources that could "just as well go directly to teachers or parents."

While interviews are filled with high praise for the integrity and personal styles that SDS coordinators brought to their work with Sahaka, at least two barriers stood in the way of full acceptance of their role. One was that the role within the total program evolved over time, and the SDS staff itself was not always consistent in its execution of its own self-defined role. In addition, since Sahaka was one of the earliest SDS partnerships, its participants had lived through various changes and had legitimate reason to be confused by them.

The second barrier rested in the fact that SDS held the purse-strings. SDS staff saw the partnership as a balance of power. All individuals on the management team were representatives to and liaisons with their organizations, each of which held the ability to terminate the project by withdrawing its participation. But, in fact, some people saw the coordinators as being more powerful than others, and they were nervous about and even resentful of the coordinators' relationship to the contract decisions.

Communicating the Purpose of SDS

As the program description in the Appendix indicates, SDS is different from what most people mean when they talk about supporting diversity in schools. Its differences are full of rich rewards but also have caused problems of communication. In the summer of 1990, SDS Director Iris Martin recalled a conversation with the executive director of a local agency, who said:

> "Never let yourself get tired of saying the same thing over and over again, because the goals and the vision that you're setting out to accomplish are not going to be understood. They are not going to be accepted, and you are going to have to say them in a thousand ways. You'll have to repeat them over and over and over again, year after year after year. Don't let yourself get tired of that."

The SDS Advisory Committee and staff does, in fact, repeatedly come back to that need. While the actual mission and goals of the program have remained constant over the years, the language and vehicles used to express them have varied. The story of Sahaka illustrates that the task of communication is not yet complete, for one can see various levels on which Sahaka participants were unsure or disagreed with one another about what they were ultimately hoping to achieve.

The Role of Sahaka's Liaisons

One of the most problematic relationships within the Sahaka partnership was that between the partnership liaison and the school. Every misunderstanding, no matter how subtle, seemed sooner or later to be played out in that relationship.

The lack of clarity about SDS purpose was visible in a similar lack of clarity regarding the liaison's role. Were the

liaisons to be brokers of Cambodian cultural values and practices to American teachers, or were they to solve problems with students? Were they to be professional colleagues with the teaching staff, or were they to take direction from Howard teachers? Were they responsible for getting specified tasks done, or were they responsible for following a schedule? Were they primarily connected to the ESL program, or were they to be resources to the entire school staff?

In many cases, the answers to these questions lay outside the experience of many of the key players within the partnership and created a no-win situation for those involved.

In summary, the SDS program creates many new roles and expectations, and the programmatic complexity that resulted from this fact was greater than anyone anticipated.

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COMPLEXITY OF DIVERSITY

The very heart of the SDS program is to create an environment where people can know and learn from each other—where walls of culture and communication can be torn down between teachers and parents who are from different racial and national backgrounds. But acknowledging diversity is hard work. It's hard to do the work; it's hard not to feel accusatory and/or defensive about the fact that it has to be done; and it's even hard to know what needs to be done in the first place.

Interviews with Sahaka participants are filled with real-life examples of how children's education is affected by the gaps that exist between the culture and history of schools and the people who run them and the cultures and history of children who are trying to learn.

Interview 1990

One of the things that has been so puzzling to us is why the Cambodian children are so different from our Hmong children. We all had the stereotype that Southeast Asian children are all the same, and we're finding that they're not. "We did this with Vietnamese children, and it worked. We did this with Hmong children, and it worked. We're doing it with Cambodian children, and it doesn't work. Why not? They should be the same, right?" But they aren't. [We have had to learn] how to view people differently, for to treat people equitably we have to recognize how different they are from one another. We really cannot say, "Everybody is the same. Treat them all alike." That's not equitable. It sounds equitable, but it is not.

Interview 1990

One of the problems is that we just don't have the information available to us. We need more people coming in and explaining cultural differences. The main resources that are available to us about Asia are from places like Japan, The Philippines, and some Hmong. But we have nothing available to us about Cambodian stories or anything like that. I did find one book.

Conversation During Site Visit 1990

The teacher gave me an example of what she'd done to try to contact a parent. She called one number. The phone was disconnected. She called a second number that was listed for emergencies, and that was disconnected, too. Then she called the child's grandmother, but she said the mother was too far away for her to contact. The grandmother gave her a neighbor's number, so she called the neighbor. Apparently the neighbor ran over to the mom's house, and the mom said she didn't want to talk with the teacher. So the neighbor came back and told the teacher that the mom didn't want to talk with her. The teacher asked if the neighbor could pass on to her that all she want-

ed was permission to use the child's picture in the school book. The neighbor ran to the mom again and came back and said that the mom agreed.

Interview 1991

A Cambodian little girl was crying, and we couldn't understand why. She refused to tell me why she was crying. I only knew that I had broken up a fight between her and a Hmong child. I kept saying, "What happened? Did he do something to you? Did he say something mean to you?" And she wouldn't say. Finally Neang Neary was able to find out. Culturally the child was afraid to say what was wrong. She's very shy. What happened was the Hmong boy kind of kiddingly said that she had a boyfriend. In the Cambodian culture, that was a real insult, a tremendous insult. I would never have realized that. So we went to a Hmong interpreter who explained it to the boy. The Hmong boy was playing with fire and really didn't know it.

These are only a few of a myriad of stories that illustrate barriers that prevent this one school's staff from being able to educate children as fully as it would want. The fact that these barriers exist is not a criticism of the teachers. They didn't create them, and no teacher training program ever taught them how to overcome them. But if Cambodian children are to succeed, the barriers must be addressed.

That these barriers exist is not a criticism of the teachers ... But if Cambodian children are to succeed, the barriers must be addressed.

The purpose of the SDS program is to help people overcome the barriers by bringing together community organizations, school staff and parents so that they can share information, perspectives and issues with one another and so that school staff will grow increasingly skillful at understanding the realities inherent in teaching children different from themselves. The story of Sahaka illustrates the obstacles to finding ways to overcome the barriers to this.

The most sobering obstacle in Sahaka was the fact that the partnership simply was unable to bring together Cambodian people and school staff in order that they might learn from one another. Over its three-year life, Sahaka's management team always had one Cambodian person officially listed on its management team—first CHSC Executive Director Lok Kosal and later Neang Sopheap after Lok Kosal left the organization. Both Lok Kosal and Neang Sopheap attended meetings of the management team infrequently. The reasons are complicated. Both Lok Kosal before his death and Neang Sopheap to this day are highly valued members of their own and the larger St. Paul communities, and their lists of community responsibilities are long. While both moved freely in widely diverse settings, they carried with them to predominantly white meetings the uncertainty of learning a culture different from their own. Both had "white American" staff members in whom they had strong confidence—first Shawn Stevens and then Henry Miller—who could effectively carry organizational and cultural concerns.

But regardless of these staff member's high-quality involvement and input, there was one contribution that they could not make to the partnership—they could not be Cambodian. Henry Miller later reflected on his role:

"Was there ever really a Khmer (Cambodian) flavor to the management team, or to the partnership activities? I would say no. They were in all ways western.

"Was there ever a Cambodian flavor to the management team, or to the partnership activities? I would say no."

"Everyone quickly learned that I was the one that they could call. When two people (Cambodian and American) had a conflict, I would get two phone calls within five minutes of each other. Always. I didn't push the problem back to them—I didn't say, 'This is your disagreement; you need to resolve it.' Watch out for people like me who try too much to protect others."

One dimension of a "Khmer flavor" would be to pay active attention to differences in spoken language, even

among fluent English speakers. Patterns of Cambodian English-speakers are different from those of American speakers. One weaves a story, the other draws a line, and the implications of these distinctions are significant. When Cambodian people spoke up in management team meetings, they often knew that the stories they had woven were not intelligible to their American listeners. They knew that they had not been understood, and their solution to the problem of misunderstanding was to remain silent or to turn to other Americans to be their spokespersons.

Neang Sopheap later said there was little input from Cambodian people, because the management team never went deep down or looked at the purpose of what it was doing.

"The Caucasians misinterpret much about reactions, manners and nonverbal language. They do not understand the things that can hurt Cambodian people but feel okay to the Americans."

"The Caucasians ... do not understand the things that can hurt Cambodian people but feel okay to the Americans."

Some Cambodian people also worried that they might hurt their American friends without knowing it. One person explained:

"Americans tend to say that things are 'very good' even if they're not good. We had to be a little bit quiet when things were not good, for we've learned that it's not right to say that to Americans. If things are not good it would be my way to say that they're not good. But saying that to an American might hurt them."

This assumption may have its roots in experiences of Americans responding negatively to criticism. Or it may stem from the experiences of some Cambodian parents in being told that their children are doing "very good" when in fact they were meeting neither the parents' nor the school's expectations of school success. As one parent explained,

"I want the teacher to be honest. Don't just say, 'Good, good!' all the time to the students when they are not really doing good."

Whatever the origin, uncertainty about what is and is not okay stands as a barrier to good communication.

Seeing the obstacles to adults' abilities to communicate fully that emerged in the partnership leads one to wonder whether the same barriers exist between teachers and children in schools. Are teachers uncertain about the meaning of Cambodian children's stories? Are Cambodian children hurt by things that feel okay to their American classmates? Do children choose silence rather than risk misinterpretation or misunderstanding? The answer to each of those questions is probably yes.

Tremendous barriers also existed within Sahaka around the issues of relative status and power that arose in situations wherein subtle and not so subtle comments put Cambodian people "in their place." For example, a Cambodian person reported that a teacher cut off a disagreement about how to handle a situation by saying that she, the teacher, had a master's degree. "I almost said that I have a Ph.D. from Cambodia to speak Cambodian." He paused, "Why should she tell me that?"

SDS staff members reflected on one dimension of the problem:

"Often, the immediate assumption is that people of color are volunteers or educational assistants, and by definition, people in those roles are there to take direction from the professionals. But what happens when you build a role for a Cambodian person in which she is not there to take direction but to work as an equal—a professional among professionals? People in schools—and in other institutions, for that matter—simply have no experience of seeing Cambodian people as professional people, and so they have no past experience to draw on to know how to interact with a Cambodian who is not there to take direction but to work as an equal with them or even to give direction.

" ... they have no past experience to draw on to know how to interact with a Cambodian who is there ... to work as an equal ..."

"Actually, the problem even goes further than that. In other partnerships, people have learned that someone of color is educated—and then you have people bypassing the parents and coming to you instead. Once you're perceived as being of color and have educational credentials, then people go to you for everything and, in the process, bypass the parents who are the very people whom we're trying to empower."

A variety of people suggested that some of the conflict across cultures was based on personality as much as culture. Even so, culture added a complicating dimension. One person talked about a clash between two people:

"There are ways of getting things done that just don't work in other cultures. It's fine to order around a 22-year-old education assistant, because that's the power relationship. But I think it's important to think about who you're talking to sometimes, especially in light of what most Cambodians have been through with authority and power and abuse. It just gives me the chills thinking about it, because Cambodians [are very sensitive about] misuse of authority. They had their lives destroyed by such things—and you just don't abuse authority with someone who is older and an outsider."

One of the continuing conflicts between SDS staff and other members of the Sahaka management team centered on the role of Cambodian parents within the partnership. "We need to involve parents," SDS staff members said repeatedly. But others replied, "It's not part of their culture," or "They're not ready." The wisdom of hindsight aids understanding how people talked past one another.

Barriers of culture, language and experience made it virtually impossible to imagine Cambodian parents serving on Sahaka's management team. Most of Howard's Cambodian parents are not fluent in English, and few have experience with American-style meetings. They come from a tradition wherein education is the responsibility of teachers and monks—not of parents. The system works because the values and practices of school, religion and family are of a piece; parents are confident that all are interconnected and work in harmony with one another. Individual parents don't become involved because they have no need to.

But such harmony of culture does not exist for Cambodians in St. Paul, and Cambodian parents do have questions and concerns about their children's school experience—about respect for food and eating preferences, discipline practices, the impact of special classes on Cambodian children's friendships with American classmates, and impressions that some school staff members may discriminate against Cambodian children. They have ideas about the aspects of their cultures that they want school staff to understand, and when they have worries about their children, they want to know that someone at the school will appreciate the import of their questions.

Unfortunately, Sahaka was never able to build vehicles that would provide regular input from Cambodian families. Some people saw the importance of getting this input but did not know how to do it. Others believed that while it might be an important long-range goal, it could not happen until the Cambodian parents themselves were ready for it. A community management team member reflected:

"[Getting Cambodian parents involved] is a difficult thing to do, but it is unequivocally a good thing to do. I just don't think people rolled up their sleeves when it came to getting parents involved.

"The fact that the idea was resisted is just amazing to me. No one said it was going to be easy. But the partnership lasted for two years. I know people on the team who never met a Khmer [Cambodian] parent, who never met a parent. So! That says something there."

Sahaka was never able to build vehicles that would provide regular input from Cambodian families.

It does say something—about the complexity inherent in parent involvement across cultures, about SDS staff's inability to define specific ways to reach its goal of parent involvement and about barriers that limited the ability of various participants in Sahaka to embrace the SDS vision.

Howard is a large and complex organization and, not surprisingly, members of its staff have varying opinions about diversity. A Howard teacher explained that school staff members have to be open and ready to learn about issues of multiculturalism and diversity because "when you start to get into it, you are going to have to do some look-

ing at yourself. When you do that, it's not always comfortable." This teacher described her experience working on the district's multicultural committee and said that the committee had a great deal of difficulty getting teachers to do things that were mandated by the state. The response was often, "Well, I took a human relations class twenty years ago" or "What are we dealing with this now for?"

Many people argue that multiculturalism and diversity should focus on the positive—that bringing people together to celebrate diversity is what it's all about. The story of Sahaka suggests that such practices alone will fall far short in providing good education for all children.

BARRIERS TO BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

In 1989, SDS staff members examined literature on collaboration and identified several key dimensions for success. They learned that successful partnership dynamics are characterized by a spirit of collaboration, perseverance, disclosure and mutual support. Leadership and communication need to be open and shared. The group must develop an ability to recognize and accept diversity, to make decisions, to convene meetings that achieve desired goals and to communicate clearly among themselves. Members need to feel comfortable challenging the assumptions of others, accepting making mistakes in program-related activities and relationships and create personal, institutional and social change. SDS staff members pledged to help each of these elements in SDS partnerships.

Four organizations came together in Sahaka: a public elementary school, a neighborhood social service agency, a Cambodian mutual assistance association and a foundation-supported program. The management structure originally proposed by Sahaka's designers called for several layers designed to facilitate various types of involvement. Significant numbers of people from Fulton and Howard would participate in the SDS Core Staff, parents and other community leaders would serve in the SDS Khmer Families group, and representatives from each would come together as partnership advisors to make overall project decisions. A broad foundation of involvement would create many pillars to support the project.

But the pillars never materialized. Instead, the partnership created a single management team of seven people - one to three people from each of the four organizations involved. As it turned out, this single support could not bear the full weight of what was required.

Each of the seven people on the partnership's management team was strong and talented, but institutional memory was lost, and there was no one left to sustain the work when personal and professional circumstances caused six people to leave the participating organizations. The problem was not caused by a lack of people committed to the goals of SDS. Howard teachers, for example, were actively involved in activities of the umbrella SDS program, but there were no structures to engage their interests within the Partnership in their own school. The pillars that formed the partnership's foundation were simply too few to sustain the loss of six people; when they left, the partnership sagged irreparably.

Institutional memory was lost, and there was no one left to sustain the work.

A second weakness of Sahaka's structure was that it provided many ways for individuals to avoid the tasks of resolving disagreements. While the group enjoyed a particularly warm and productive "honeymoon period" during its first year, it was, in retrospect, quite unprepared to deal with the conflicts that jarred it in the fall of 1990 and to arrest the slow erosion of trust and openness that characterized the next 18 months of its life. Discomfort with conflict, unresolved differences, and high turnover of participants caused difficulties that were simply too great to overcome. Principal Meg Phillips reflected on her involvement in the partnership over several years:

> "There has to be a recognition that conflict is healthy, and that it is not something to be eliminated or pushed under the rug. If we're part of a family and you and I are having conflict, the rest of the family members should not try to make us get along. They should recognize our conflict as symptomatic of something; everyone should assist in finding a way to help.
>
> "It was everybody's role [to solve the problems of the partnership] ... everybody's role. But you know the old

story. When everybody has to do something, then everybody assumes that somebody else is doing it, and nobody does it.

"Each of us tried so hard to solve our own problems. And we ended up all doing the same thing when we could have learned from each other. Maybe it's the result of all of us being in agencies where we have had to do that. We've all been trained to do that. But we needed to have some way of recognizing what was happening and for someone to say it was okay to deal with it in a different way.

"SDS offered to do conflict resolution workshops, which didn't feel good to us. I'm not sure if I can give you an objective reason why. What we wanted to do was have more opportunity to do it ourselves."

Henry Miller was a relative latecomer to the partnership when he joined the CHSC staff in November 1991. He thought back on what he had found when he joined the management team:

"Even though there was lots of conflict, I can't recall a single attempt by the whole group to resolve it. At no time did the group say, 'There is tension here. Now we're going to put all our cards on the table. We're going to yell at each other or talk to each other or whatever we need to do in order to resolve these issues.'

"I never heard of such a meeting taking place, and I think it would have been useful. Maybe it would have been appropriate for SDS people to force that kind of discussion."

Interview notes are filled with examples of people's efforts to put the best face on conflict. People repeatedly came out of a major disagreement saying that the problems had evaporated: "We had some real problems, but they're all solved now," "We really had some big disagreements, but we share the same goals now—we're all confident that things will be okay."

Eventually a "culture of silence" set in. Things may have been discussed between individuals privately, but they were not brought publicly to the table for all to work together toward resolution. SDS Director Iris Martin recalled an incident illustrating this:

Eventually a culture of silence set in.

"At one point, Meg Phillips and I had a candid phone conversation in which we talked frankly about roles. It was a good conversation, and Meg invited me to attend the next Sahaka management team meeting. She said, 'It's time we get some of those things out onto the table.'

"When I went to the meeting, Meg called on me immediately after bringing the meeting to order. But it was way too soon for me to take such a risk. I hadn't gotten any feeling for the group yet, I didn't have any sense of my place in it. I mumbled something about wanting to wait till later in the meeting.

"The rest of the meeting consisted of an uncomfortable discussion about whether Neang Neary should take on the responsibilities of the education assistant in the school. Then, as people were getting up to leave, a teacher turned to me and said, 'Oh, did you have some things you wanted to talk about?' People had just sat through one tension-filled discussion, and some were already standing and on their way out the door. And now I'm going to open up a new Pandora's box? No way.

"I felt terrible about it. This was just at the time when Meg was leaving Howard to take a position at the central office. I tried to phone her a couple times, but she wasn't in, and I finally just didn't follow through. In other words I, too, had accepted and fed into the silence and avoidance that dominated the partnership."

Probably the most damaging effect of the culture of silence was the fact that it created "insiders" and "outsiders" to any given discussion—those who knew and those who did not know what was going on. The most dramatic example of this was the decision to dissolve the partnership. It is possible that a few people knew months in advance that

the partnership would not seek continued funding with SDS. While some people struggled to solve problems and plan for the future, others may have known that there was no future.

Building a structure is not exciting, and there is a tendency for SDS partnerships to set that task aside in favor of the more interesting and rewarding work of designing activities. But the story of Sahaka illustrates the importance of structure: the need for groups that make the decisions and do the work, individuals who convene the meetings and write the minutes, layers that permit each person to find the right niche for input, various forms of communication that keep staffs informed, and visible expectations that keep everyone engaged. All these elements are critical to the success of a project.

The story of Sahaka illustrates the importance of structure.

THE CHALLENGE OF MAINTAINING OWNERSHIP

The SDS staff and Advisory Committee have always taken great pride in the large number and variety of people who contributed to the design of the program, as well as in the inclusion of all roles and races in its implementation and governance. But the story of Sahaka reveals that the task of building ownership is never finished. The deep sense of ownership in the design of the SDS program is real, but the legacy old-timers leave behind can feel inappropriately obtrusive and top-down to those who follow. Even though the Advisory Committee is made up of school staff members, parents, and community organization people, some partnership management team members have referred to them as "outsiders" who don't know the school process. Some bristle at the requirement that they fulfill the dreams of those who came before; it's their own dreams that they want to make real.

And what happens when the old-timers bring experience that partnership people don't have? Does the goal of ownership dictate that people should be allowed to make their own decision, even when strong evidence suggests that it will be a mistake?

Sahaka's liaison position is a case in point. Early on, SDS Director Iris Martin carried a message to the management team that using such a liaison is often used as a strategy of institutional change — and it does not work. In Iris Martin's experience, creating this kind of position was a sure fire way of preventing widespread ownership of the program.

Though members of the management team thought this message infringed on their independence, they were eager to compromise, and everyone agreed on a part-time, rather than full-time, liaison. Two years later, some members of the team said that they never should have created the position—not because of the people who held it but because of the position itself. One person reflected:

> "The liaison role is a mistake. A school, a public school, is not the easiest place to hang out when you are not a teacher. And as it was, people could just say, 'That's the liaison's job. I don't have to worry about it.' There were lots of us who should have been doing the work. But having the liaison let people off the hook. Because this person was hired, everybody could say, 'I don't have any responsibility here now.'"

Another person reinforced this point of view from a different perspective:

> "To our amazement, we just didn't have a structure in place to deal with this kind of employee. We couldn't deal with issues in a school district format because it wasn't a school district employee. Fulton had its own employment format, and CHSC was just developing as a new organization. So here we have a person around, but we had no way to address the related issues."

A similar example of ownership and autonomy was visible within Sahaka itself. In its first proposal, the team explicitly stated that the liaison position must not be seen as a "school" person—that the liaison should not be supervised by school staff. But for all intents and purposes, the liaison was supervised by school staff, and repeated conflicts arose over questions about that relationship. Most of the people who had chosen in the early days of Sahaka to

prevent this from happening were gone. The partnership's own principles of design got lost in high turnover and the resulting loss of institutional memory.

An even more serious issue of ownership emerged when a Howard staff member said that the SDS program simply did not fit his own and several colleagues' views of what diversity is all about. In their opinion, the program had a strong political agenda that did not belong in the school—they saw it as radical and outside of what they perceived most people to believe. While these teachers agreed that supporting diversity was a wonderful idea, they said that supporting diversity should not serve as a "wedge that divides people." They said that it should translate into posters, artifacts or other specific things to use in their classrooms.

The partnership's own principles of design got lost in high turnover.

Interviews with several teachers illuminated the strong differences in the school over the ultimate goal of diversity. Some people saw the goal as assimilation; others saw it as a mosaic of differences. Should the school help all students and parents understand and fit into the dominant culture of the school and community, or should it seek to learn from people of other cultures?

The St. Paul superintendent of schools says that SDS supports the central goals of the school district, and several district staff members sit on the SDS Advisory Committee, which makes policy for the program. What happens when strong differences over goals exist within the institution? Who has the right and/or responsibility to make the school a part of the SDS program?

SUMMARY

Participants in Sahaka were trying to accomplish many things at once. They sought to address issues of cultural difference, to accommodate varying expectations within community organizations and schools and to build a structure within a new program that was, itself, only in blueprint form. After studying the Sahaka experience, it is hard to avoid the question of whether everyone was trying to do too much. Was the program unnecessarily complex? Would people have been more successful if they could have tackled only one task at a time?

Simplicity is an attractive idea. But what would a simpler program look like? Which element could be eliminated or postponed? Bringing about changes in schools requires the active participation of school people. Efforts to learn Cambodian points of view cannot succeed without the involvement of Cambodian people. Staff turnover cannot be avoided, and variation in levels of commitment is inevitable. So while it may be attractive, is greater simplicity possible?

Understanding the context of these questions requires knowing that Sahaka is one of a family of SDS school-community partnerships. It is not the first partnership to be lost to the program, but it is the first to dissolve of its own accord. And while all the other ongoing SDS partnerships have been successful in building the lines of communication necessary to sustain healthy relationships, the issues that led to the dissolution of Sahaka are visible within all of them in one degree or another.

The story of Sahaka offers exceedingly valuable information to people involved in the SDS program. Knowledge of Sahaka's work and experience will be a valuable resource to people in the program who strive to balance the inevitable complexity and desirable simplicity of effort to increase racial equity.

Some people saw the goal as assimilation; others saw it as a mozaic of differences.

WHAT WAS GAINED?

It is important to end this profile of Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer with a look at the positive accomplishments of the partnership.

People within the four organizations of Sahaka have gained much from this experience. Through activities and relationships created by the partnership, Cambodian parents' comfort in the school has increased visibly. Several members of the Howard and Fulton staffs know more about the history of Cambodian people, and many of Howard's teachers and students have benefited from the cultural presentations that Sahaka's liaisons made in the school's classrooms. Several Howard staff members experienced personal growth from attending public workshops sponsored by the umbrella SDS program. The school has a richer library of Cambodian materials and artifacts. Cambodian, Mexican, Hmong and African American children have learned to perform and appreciate the beauty of Cambodian classical dance.

Positive relationships in Sahaka were never more powerfully realized than when dozens of Cambodian people not otherwise associated with the school felt respected and honored at Howard when the partnership participated in a memorial celebration in the school gym for Lok Kosal following his death. Fulton, Howard and CHSC are building on the positive aspects of the foundation they have laid.

Members of the SDS staff have learned much about its own role in the partnership's difficulties and are finding ways to apply those lessons to work with other partnerships and to the next chapter of Sahaka being created with CHSC's merger with the Organization of Khmer.

And finally, the willingness of those involved in Sahaka Siksa Kaun Khmer to share their experiences and lessons will allow others throughout the community to learn and improve the quality of their own work. Disenchanted young people, wasted talents of both young and old, and gang-related crime are the legacy of our community's inability to address the issues to which participants in Sahaka dedicated their time for three years. Wherever one is located throughout the policy and practitioner levels of education, government, private industry, health care or human services, Sahaka has lessons to offer that, heeded and addressed, will clearly make life in our community better for everyone.

Sahaka has lessons to offer that will clearly make life in our community better for everyone.

APPENDIX

SDS: A NEW SOLUTION TO AN OLD PROBLEM

In Saint Paul, as elsewhere throughout the nation, achievement scores and rates of enrollment in institutions of higher learning are lower for students of color than for white students. Dropout rates for students of color are higher. The SDS program is based on the hypothesis that the racially homogeneous professional staff of local schools is ill equipped to address the educational needs of an increasingly heterogeneous student body and that strong links between schools and communities of color are necessary to change the dismal statistics.

The mission of SDS is to reduce the educational inequities experienced by children as a result of race or culture by building school environments that welcome, appreciate and effectively teach students of color. The program seeks to accomplish this mission by: (1) helping to build curricula and school environments that are free of cultural and racial privilege, (2) helping school staff members learn from communities and families whose cultures are different from their own and to apply their new skills and knowledge, (3) affirming and strengthening the role of community organizations as cultural bridges between schools and parents of color, and (4) affirming families of color as needed experts and resources regarding their children and their cultures.

SDS is administered by The Saint Paul Foundation. It is funded by The Saint Paul Foundation, the F.R. Bigelow Foundation, The Bush Foundation, the Cowles Media Foundation, the General Mills Foundation, the Knight Foundation, the Mardag Foundation, The St. Paul Companies, Inc., various individual donors and in-kind support from the Saint Paul Public Schools. SDS is managed by a multicultural staff that includes two co-directors and four coordinators. A volunteer community advisory committee is responsible for program policy decisions. The program began in August 1989 and will continue through August 1995. Its six-year budget projection is approximately $2 million.

To understand SDS, it can be helpful to look at what the program is not. SDS is administered by a foundation, but the program itself does not act like one. People in education and human services know that foundations generally receive proposals, award money, send out grant checks, and then stay away until they need a final project report. SDS does some of that—it receives proposals and hands out money. But it awards contracts, instead of giving grants, and its staff has an ongoing role in each project.

SDS's overriding goal is to increase the school success of students of color. But it does not do the things that are commonly accepted as effective in accomplishing that goal. It does not provide bilingual aides, culturally similar tutors or special mentors to stretch the expectations of students.

SDS talks about family involvement, but it is not satisfied with the things that most family involvement programs do. SDS staff presses partnerships to go beyond typical programs that help people learn to be better parents or explain school discipline policies.

Finally, SDS pushes for multicultural curriculum, but it does not support using contract money to take students to special museum exhibits. It is not satisfied with the idea of teachers working with each other to develop new curriculum, and it says that school multicultural fairs and similar extravaganzas are not enough.

So if those are the things that SDS is not, what is SDS? It is a program based on the belief that people's present lives are shaped by their histories and that racial and national cultures shape how people interact with and learn from one another. The people of SDS believe that those two facts are significant elements in the low success rates of students of color who can spend 12-year s in school without having any teachers who share their history or culture, where no one who has experienced the same things they have is making policy decisions that affect their daily classroom experience and where the curriculum offers only a peripheral understanding of who they are and where they come from. Such environments are, at best, unfriendly places for children who are trying to learn.

Many people throughout St. Paul and the nation are trying to address this problem. Some programs seek to increase the numbers of teachers of color, some provide special tutoring services to overcome students' deficits of learning or motivational deficits and still others enrich the curriculum to be affirming and inclusive of all children.

The builders of SDS philosophically support all of those programs, but they seek to add to the richness of short- and long-range solutions by focusing on a slightly different aspect of the challenge. SDS looks at the discrepancies between the heterogeneous population of students in St. Paul (46 percent of color and rising) and the homogeneous

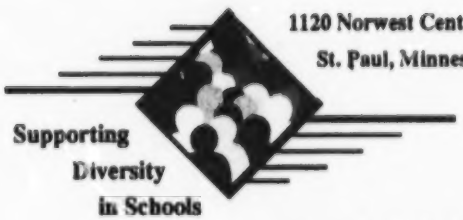
population of teachers (92 percent white and holding steady), and it concludes that the increased success of students of color depends to a significant degree on increased experience, knowledge, communication skills and cultural understanding on the part af all school staff members.

Increasing the racial diversity of the teaching staff is an important goal, and the school district takes significant steps in that direction through various recruitment activities and by hiring bilingual education assistants. But since students of color spend the overwhelming majority of their time with white staff members, it is also essential for those staff members to learn things that they have probably never before had the opportunity to learn: to feel comfortable working with people of color, to acquire a working knowledge of the children's histories, and the events that have profoundly shaped their lives, and to understand the language patterns that many refugee children bring to the task of speaking and understanding English, as well as other cultural patterns that may affect the way they learn.

SDS has no ready-made solutions to hand to teachers, principals, lunchroom aides, maintenance people and others at the schools with which the program works. Instead, it seeks to bring together the people who have the best skills to create the solutions themselves—the parents and community people who are experts on their own cultures and histories and the educators and other school people who are experts in teaching and learning as well as other dynamics of school life.

Thus, SDS family involvement programs may include activities that teach parents about school issues, but they also provide time for parents to discuss their culture and views with teachers. While its goals advocate more inclusive curriculum, SDS's creators believe that teachers lack important skills needed to create it—that they need help from parents and other community people who best know the culture being included. Furthermore, while SDS applauds multicultural fairs and extravaganzas, it seeks to move beyond the celebration of food and dance to a deeper understanding of issues and values.

It is the premise of SDS that this vital work can be done only if schools and communities share the responsibility with one another—only if they learn together and from each other. The vehicles for this work are the six SDS school-community partnerships and the wide array of educational activities that SDS provides for educators, parents and community members throughout the larger community.



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